



A partner of  
Humanists UK

national  
secular  
society

IHEU  
International  
Humanist and  
Ethical Union



# Dorset Humanists

*Atheists and agnostics for a better world*

■ **Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> August 2.00pm** Moordown  
Community Centre, Coronation Avenue  
BH9 1TW

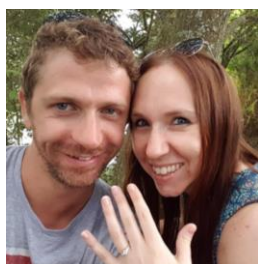
## The Big Change in Religion and Belief



A talk by Jeremy Rodell

Britain is currently going through what's been called the biggest change in religion and belief landscape since the Reformation, 500 years ago. But what's really going on? It's a lot more complex than simply a decline in organised religion and an increase in those who have no religion. Some faith groups are themselves growing. And what do we mean by 'non-religious' anyway? Or 'religious' for that matter? What might humanists do to play a constructive role in making this great social change work for everyone? Jeremy Rodell is Humanists UK's volunteer Dialogue Officer and a former Trustee.

## Congratulations!



Huge congratulations to Simon Whitlock and Josie Butcher on their engagement. Simon is a former Treasurer of Dorset Humanists and Josie is our Librarian.

■ **Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> August 7.30pm**  
Green House Hotel, Grove Road, BH1 3AX



## Death Café

At a Death Café people gather to eat cake, drink tea or coffee and discuss death. The objective of a

Death Café is 'to increase awareness of death with a view to helping people make the most of their finite lives'. It's a group-directed discussion of death with no set agenda. It's a discussion group not a grief support or counselling session. Death Café aims to be accessible, respectful and confidential with no intention of leading people to any particular conclusion or course of action.

Web designer Jon Underwood from Hackney, East London, founded Death Café in 2011. He died in 2017 at the age of 44. The Death Café model was developed by Jon Underwood and Sue Barsky Reid, based on the ideas of Swiss sociologist Bernard Crettaz.

*"When people sit down to talk about death, the pretence falls away, and people talk very openly and authentically. And they say things in front of strangers which are really profound and beautiful."* Jon Underwood

Dorset Humanists' Death Café will be facilitated by David Warden who is Chair of Dorset Humanists. David is currently studying for a diploma in humanistic counselling and psychotherapy.

Send bulletin updates to [chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk](mailto:chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk)

HMRC Charities Ref No EW10227



[dorsethumanists.co.uk](http://dorsethumanists.co.uk)



[@dorsethumanists](https://twitter.com/dorsethumanists)



[Dorset Humanists](https://www.facebook.com/Dorset-Humanists)



[meetup.com/Dorset-Humanists](https://www.meetup.com/Dorset-Humanists)

■ **Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> August 7.30pm** and every first Thursday evening of the month at Moon in the Square, Exeter Rd, BH2 5AQ



## Pub socials

Enjoy stimulating conversation over a drink or two at our pub social evening. Look out for the Dorset Humanists signs on the table. We warmly welcome regulars and newcomers.

☎ Dean 07713 858773



## Sunday Walks

■ **Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> August** – Hardy's Cottage and Puddletown

Forest. As promised, to those who came on this fine walk in the winter time, here is a chance to repeat it in summer and see how the forest and heath have changed. It has been a good season for butterflies so we're hopeful for a lot of interesting sightings. Bring David Attenborough's "Big Butterfly Count" spotting chart! (... even though we will be a few days late to submit it.)

All walks are between about 6 and 9 miles and usually have an optional short cut. Please check [Meetup](#) for further details and any last minute cancellations due to weather conditions. Phil ☎ 07817 260498



## Short Talks

■ **Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> August**

**7.30pm** Green House Hotel,

Grove Road, BH1 3AX. £2.00-3.00 donation requested.

## Education and Inequality

Two talks by John Hubbard and Lucy Jenkins.

Inequality is increasing in the UK and many people are asking 'What can be done about it?'. John Hubbard will ask whether it is possible to reduce inequality and to what extent education is a contributing factor. Do our current structures and systems perpetuate privilege from one generation to the next and do recent changes help those keen to develop true equality of opportunity

or make a coherent strategy impossible? Are the secondary schools and universities able to ensure that talent is identified and nurtured across the whole nation for our future prosperity or are current trends repressing the creativity, dynamism, and individuality necessary for a modern economy?

John Hubbard has taught English in both private and state schools in Dorset. Now retired, he teaches English and Drama in a voluntary capacity for the University of the Third Age (U3A) in Bournemouth.

Each talk is around 20 minutes followed by questions and discussion. See Meetup for further details.

**Calling budding speakers!** Do you have a short talk up your sleeve? Contact Phil Butcher if you would like to discuss your idea for a short talk.

✉ [ph.butcher@gmail.com](mailto:ph.butcher@gmail.com)



■ **Friday 17<sup>th</sup> August**  
**7.00pm Middle Chine**

## Beach Barbecue & Fireworks

Join us for a fun evening on the beach with pier fireworks at 10pm. Bring your own food and bits to share. Dean will sizzle your bits.

### **Future dates for your diary...**

■ **Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> September 2.00pm**  
Moordown

## Democracy, Devolution and Discrimination: Has Northern Ireland been left behind?

A talk by Northern Ireland Humanists Development Officer Boyd Sleator. Boyd will be discussing how part of the UK has been left behind when it comes to human rights and equality. Northern Ireland is probably the most conservative part of the UK, and even though it has a devolved government, that does not stop it being



under jurisdiction of Westminster. For the last 50 years, women in the rest of the UK have had access to abortion health care, yet today in Northern Ireland, women are still being prosecuted for obtaining abortion pills. Scotland, England, Wales and the Republic of Ireland have all allowed for same-sex couples to marry, yet in Northern Ireland, where the vast majority of people and most Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly are in favour of same-sex marriage, the conservative Christian politicians block it. Boyd will talk about what Northern Ireland Humanists, with the help of Humanists UK, are doing to drag this small part of the UK into the 21st century.

■ **Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> September 7.30pm**  
Green House

## Evolution and Ethics

Where does morality come from? *Homo sapiens* has existed for about 200,000 years, but only for about 10,000 years in civilised society. The rest of the time we existed as hunter gatherers, and the species from which we evolved were also hunter gatherers. Evolutionary characteristics, including ethics, are likely to have been formed long before the rise of civilisation. Some patterns of behaviour are inherited in societies but a large amount of experimental data has now shown that perhaps more than 80 per cent of our basic behaviour patterns are controlled by our genes.

Greg Atkins was a Professor of Science (Virology) at Trinity College Dublin until he retired and a founder member of the Humanist Association of Ireland.

### Other events of interest...

■ **Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> August 7.30pm**  
Skeptics in the Pub at Brunswick Pub, 199 Malmesbury Park Rd, BH8 8PX. £3

## Stories from the Frontline of the Future

...with writer, entrepreneur, broadcaster, and futurologist Mark Stevenson.



Dorset Humanists *Life School* runs a variety of self-development courses focusing on how we can live good and fulfilling lives. Course attendees will be invited to study and critically reflect on the best scientific and philosophical resources available. A great way to meet people and develop friendships. 'Life School' continues this autumn with an exciting new series:

## The Existentialism Course

### How to Love Your Life and Live Every Day as if it were your Last

The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche wrote that if you do not wish to re-live every day of your life over and over again then you're not doing it right. This is perhaps the greatest challenge of existentialism: to live each day like that. But is this possible or even desirable? This course will draw on the writings of philosophers Julian Baggini and Gary Cox, both of whom have given talks to Dorset Humanists. It will also draw on the philosophical work of Don Cupitt and Terry Eagleton and a range of existential psychotherapies including the work of Dutch therapist Emmy Van Deurzen.

This course runs for six consecutive Mondays from Monday 1<sup>st</sup> October to Monday 5<sup>th</sup> November 7.30-9.15pm. All at Moordown Community Centre.

A £15 non-refundable deposit secures your place on the course (£10 for members) and there's nothing more to pay, except for refreshments during the break.

The course facilitator is David Warden, Chair of Dorset Humanists. Contact details are below. *Book now - limited spaces.*

■ Feedback from our 'Happiness Course':

*"I hope you will do the course again in some format as it was life-changing."* Amy

*"Very well run course, extensively prepared and researched, professionally presented."* Paul





## Dorset Humanists at Bourne Free

Dorset Humanists was cheered by thousands as we marched in Bournemouth's diversity extravaganza. This year saw some first-timers brave their first Pride march and they were pleasantly surprised at how uplifting the experience can be.

Dorset Humanists supports LGBT equality along with Dorset Fire and Rescue, Dorset Police, the RNLI, South Western Ambulance Service, the NHS, Bournemouth hotels, the Quakers, the Inclusive Community Church, Lloyds Bank, Barclays Bank, Nationwide Building Society, Macmillan Cancer Support, Siemens, Humanists UK, Bournemouth Council, and many more organisations that were in the Bourne Free parade. Dorset Humanists is the *only* group which draws attention to some of the shocking statistics both in the UK and worldwide which convey the fact that the struggle for LGBT human rights is far from over. We can be rightly proud of this year's Human Rights Champions Carolyn Gardiner, Frances Usher, Huw Griffiths and Michelle, Dave Elleman, Sally Hawksworth, Deborah Coveney, David Warden, Sophie, Stu Miller, and cheerleader extraordinaire Aaron Darkwood. Chris Geake and Bryan from LGBT Humanists also joined us on the march having travelled from London and Brighton to be with us. Dean Robertson ran ahead to take the photos (now on our Facebook page). A big thanks also to Daniel Dancey, Ronnie Barr, Lyn Glass, David and Elaine Stott, Adam Stoddart, Marbellys Bayne-Azcarate, Mike Forte, and Phil Butcher who helped out in various ways with our fabulously adorned Humanist tent in the Lower Gardens where we interacted with zillions of passers-by.

*From Dave Elleman*

This was the first time I've joined DH in the Pride parade and it was really good fun. I had an enjoyable day and I recommend coming along to future years' Pride celebrations to all our members, whatever



**Rainbow warriors Aaron and Lyn**

their own sexual orientation happens to be. As well as doing something worthwhile it's great to see Bournemouth town centre looking so colourful!

*From Frances Usher*

This was the first time I'd taken part, and it was nothing like I'd expected. What was that? I don't remember; expectations were swept away as soon as I arrived. There was a rainbow-covered fire engine in the Square, and chunky, smiling firemen with garlands round their necks. From then on, that whole morning, the tone was set. So many people, so many rainbow flags, so much clapping and waving and cheering. It seemed the parade no longer needed to convince spectators of anything. They knew already, they were happy to include us and we could celebrate together. It was a hot day and I was weary by the end. But so glad to have been there, so glad to see the unbelievable change there's been in my lifetime. We must never let it go.

*From Aaron Darkwood*

As we walked along Bourne Avenue and neared Tesco metro in the Square we were cheered by thousands of people. The energy, the volume, the number of people there was overwhelming. For those moments it must be what a pop star feels like, or footballers entering a stadium. Thousands of people, and they are all cheering us, Dorset Humanists. Our



placards gained a lot of support, agreement and respect, and that moment in time mattered. If you weren't there, you missed out on a truly special moment. As one of the biggest groups in the UK with 150+ members I'm sure we can field more than ten of us next time. Please, please make the effort to give us 90 minutes of your time next July. You won't regret it.

■ Dorset Humanists is a partner of the Dorset LGB&T Equality Network and of Humanists UK LGBT section.



## Pride & Prejudice

*Following our appearance at the Bourne Free Festival, three of our members from different generations gave personal and highly moving talks on their experiences of being gay and/or trans.*



**Frances Usher** was born just six weeks into the Second World War. When she grew up she became a librarian and was acutely aware of censorship. There was a 'special section in the library and

Frances 'read them all'! Police did routine toilet duty to prevent 'gross indecency'. Those convicted simply vanished and were not spoken about. Male homosexuality was represented by comedians such as Kenneth Williams and Frankie Howerd. Frances hated the L word and thought that her feelings would 'settle down'. Everything changed when she joined Lee Abbey Christian Community in Devon. This turned her life upside down and changed her in every way. It was there that she met Angela Joynson and they have been together for 44 years. Frances was struck by the 'colossal change' represented by Bourne Free festival and she will never forget taking part.

**Aaron Darkwood** knew he was different right from the start. He grew up in the era of Boy George when the words 'poof' and 'queer' were bandied about. It was 'us' and 'them' and Aaron knew he was more drawn to 'them' (which included the milkman!).

He recalls a talk at school hearing a talk about AIDS and felt that 'they are talking about me in disgust'. Things got a little easier when TV soaps like Eastenders featured gay couples like Barry and Colin.

Hard to believe now but at school Aaron was a quiet person and subjected to bullying. He was pushed up against lockers and jostled every morning. At break time he hid himself away in the library.

He eventually came out of the closet when he discovered Star Trek roleplay and he was accepted by the group of people he met through this pursuit. He also enjoyed Airsoft (a military simulation sport where players participate in mock combat) and found that younger people accepted him. He held hands with another man once for three minutes.

In the 1990s he suffered more homophobic attacks. Someone on a motorbike tried to run him over, he was hit by branches, someone held a knife to his throat, and a mob held him underwater. In 1998 he took an overdose.

He found acceptance by joining a gay outdoor club. He went clubbing in his 30s and fancy dress helped him to get attention. At work he was fortunate to have a manager who was gay. But depression started to build and he took another overdose in 2008. Like the star of the TV series *Cucumber* he was phobic about anal sex and therefore avoided gay relationships and chased straight men instead.

Moving to Bournemouth he found acceptance in Dorset Humanists but the stress of a period of homelessness in 2017 led to another overdose.

Aaron said that years of torment from external threats both real and anticipated have resulted in decreased self-esteem, anxiety, depression, self-doubt, and confidence, trust and intimacy issues. The knock on consequences include unfulfilled career aspirations (Navy), relationships that never really went anywhere, lateness in starting a mortgage which he subsequently lost, repeated life mistakes due to lack of confidence, social anxiety and egotistical narcissism traits. In general, his early experiences have left him 'a bit fucked up'.





**Ronnie Barr** (left) is twenty years old and identifies as gay and transgender. In his talk he said: "I've spent a long time trying desperately to avoid the prejudice and hate that comes hand in hand with being openly

gay or Trans.

At school I hung out with the boys and shunned the girls. I thought girls and their insistence on playing housewives and trading make-up tips was the most pointless thing imaginable. I found myself torn between stopping the girls from trying to set me up with boys and insisting to bullies that I wasn't a lesbian. I hadn't yet hit puberty, I had no interest in kissing or dating when I was sat at home reading. I wasn't interested in having relationships yet, and as I once told my family, if I ever did hit puberty I'd chop my boobs off. But every day was torture for me. I'd come into school, try and focus on my lessons, and fail to avoid the consistent stream of taunts and questions about my sexuality and non-existent love life. By my final year of middle school the boys were actively trying to avoid me, the teachers signed me up to a programme to boost girls' confidence by giving them makeovers and styling their hair, and I got accepted into an all-girls grammar school.

Before the end of the first term I got diagnosed with depression. I was in my dream school but I was miserable. All the teasing and probing had taken its toll on me, I spent most nights crying myself to sleep and failing to avoid thinking about suicide. I was only 12. Every day I came into school in my baggy trousers and plain attire, surrounded by girls in hiked-up skirts and adorned in as much makeup and jewellery as the dress code allowed. I felt like I'd stepped onto an alien planet. As my friends began their journeys to becoming young ladies I struggled to maintain my identity. Seeing my body develop and change left me feeling physically and mentally sick.

By the start of my second year I conceded I was gay but refused to acknowledge that I was transgender. Instead I decided that as

a gay female I was supposed to be butch and proceeded to keep my appearance as masculine as possible. Though I had very supportive friends I began getting tormented by girls in other year groups. Every day girls would lean over, whisper the word 'lesbian' in my ear, and walk off. It got so bad that I was scared to be alone and the teachers decided to employ my friends as body guards. The teasing eventually lessened with my friends supporting me but I still felt strange. I was okay with my sexuality by this point but I still felt that there was a piece of the puzzle missing. Being masculine had always felt right to me. I didn't like shaving, I preferred my hair short, and all the clothes I liked came from the men's section. I had no interest in having curves or large breasts. Everything about being a girl felt wrong. I wanted biceps and abs and a soul patch on my chin (a small tuft of facial hair directly below a man's lower lip). I wanted to go out topless in the summer and not have a chest poking out, I wanted to rock up to prom in a nice suit with a matching tie.

I know now that I made the biggest mistake of my life: knowing I wanted to transition but refusing to face it, to figure out what I wanted, what I needed to do. I was getting support from my local LGBT group Space but another year and a half passed and I was still figuring out what it was I wanted. I seemed insistent on making myself miserable, on putting anything and anyone else first so long as it meant avoiding my gender. And then I finally stopped hiding and I started living.

It took roughly another year to figure out what I needed to do. I finally started to put myself and my wellbeing first. I joined Communi-T, a trans group for people over 18, and started getting actively involved. I tried out different names, eventually deciding on Ronald Alistair Barr, more often known as Ronnie, after my granddad Ron Barr. I tried different pronouns as I transitioned, starting off as non-binary they/them before eventually admitting I'm simply male and he/him. I started to cut my hair again, gradually getting shorter. The muscular male physique I had thought about was nothing like my scrawny body but

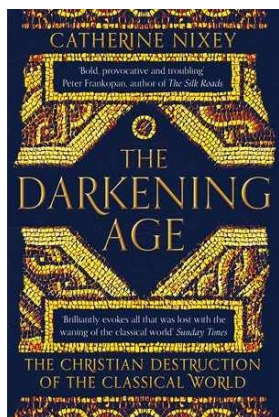


I could take up the sports I loved and try and maintain a healthy lifestyle. I'd never be able to get the facial hair I wanted on my own but with some luck going on hormones would change that, and hopefully it would also change my voice that I absolutely hate.

I've had many people cut me out of their lives because they refuse to believe I'm a man, some people refuse to answer my messages and some block me on social media. Some people still try to keep me in their lives but refuse to acknowledge what I'm doing. Some people insist on sending me information about how harmful transitioning gender is and how it's a mental disorder. But for all the problems I'm encountering I do seem to be on track for the life I want, the life I need to live. I'm well on my way to finally being the man I am inside and no one can take that away from me.

---

## The Christian Destruction of the Classical World



Journalist and prize-winning author Catherine Nixey gave us a spellbinding talk at the Green House Hotel about her book 'The Darkening Age'.

Catherine told us that she grew up believing in the Hollywood version of history in which poor

Christians were persecuted by nasty Romans usually played by Peter Ustinov. She said 'I was wrong'. Christians were not eaten by lions and there were only thirteen years of imperial persecution or more likely prosecution of Christians. Christians committed suicide in vast numbers because they wanted to be martyrs, believing that in death they would be rewarded a hundredfold. Everyone was terrified of this 'death sect'.

Catherine painted a vivid picture of Christian fanatics bursting into a pagan festival, smashing musical instruments and idols, dragging people into the streets and blinding them with acid. Their infamous cry was *laus deo!* (praise the Lord!).

When Constantine converted to Christianity around the year 312 less than ten per cent of the population under Roman jurisdiction was Christian. Over the course of the following century, sixty million people were forcibly converted to Christianity. 'Pagan' temples (more accurately, polytheist temples) were attacked, idols were smashed and melted down, and statues were decapitated. It is thought that the Parthenon marbles were mauled by Christians and in 385 the colossal statue of Athena in Palmyra was decapitated and delimbed. The beautiful statues in the Temple of Serapis in Alexandria were similarly razed to the ground. The Christians of course described themselves as liberators, not vandals.

One of the most shocking murders carried out by Christians was of the brilliant female mathematician and astronomer Hypatia in 415. Christians thought that mathematical symbols and the astrolabe were instruments of the Devil. They stripped and flayed her, gouged out her eyes and burnt her, finally dragging her remains around and putting her on to a rubbish dump as a warning to others.

Ninety per cent of classical literature was lost – the classical world was being erased. Was this the triumph of Christianity? Catherine reminded us that the word 'triumph' means a military victory.

■ Reviews of Nixey's book are strongly polarised. Tim Whitmarsh review is [here](#). See our Facebook page for more debate.

---

## Could you be a schools speaker?

Humanists UK will be running a schools speaker training course for us on Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> September. Please email David on [chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk](mailto:chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk) for more details.



## Dorset Humanists **Chairman's View**

August 2018

**A**t the end of July I had the privilege of delivering a training course at for the South Central England Humanists Network on how to lead and manage a humanist group. Phil Butcher supported me with a short presentation on our monthly walks and innovative Short Talks programme. Ten people attended from Basingstoke Humanists, South Hants Humanists, Brighton Humanists, Guildford & Woking Humanists, and Horsham/Chichester Humanists. Preparing the course stimulated much thought and reflection and on the day itself I was buoyed up by participants' enthusiasm and motivation to develop and build their humanist groups. This kind of regional networking, cross-fertilisation of ideas, and mutual support is long overdue and I am grateful in particular to David Brittain, chair of the Network, for his energy and commitment in getting it off the ground. The Network has already succeeded in planting a new group in Portsmouth.

**S**ome people have asked me what existentialism means – the subject of our autumn 'Life School' evening course. If you're not familiar with it, don't be put off by the word. The original works of existential philosophers can be difficult and opaque but this course will strip things back to some of their essential ideas and how they can be of practical use in our lives. Existentialism, as Jean-Paul Sartre claimed, is a type of humanism. It focuses on how we should live our lives in the face of uncertainty, responsibility, freedom, and mortality. Existentialist ideas have been taken up by a range of contemporary existentialist-humanistic psychotherapists such as Emmy Van Deurzen who seek to help clients find meaning and passion in their lives. If you would like to come on the course you might like to obtain a copy of Gary Cox's book 'How to Be an Existentialist: Or How to Get Real, Get a Grip and Stop Making Excuses' for some summer pre-course reading.

**I** have been very fortunate in having experienced very little homophobia over the last thirty years. I'm well aware, however, that far too many people still face opposition, denial, lack of understanding, lack of support, and outright physical attacks. People shouldn't have to 'come out' of any closets. Difference, not conformity, should be the norm. Does Bourne Free help or hinder the cause? Those who join us just have a good time being entertained by human diversity in all its exuberance and quirkiness.

*David Warden*

